

## **Garfield Board of Education Issues Investigation Reports Detailing Employee Improperities Regarding Applications for Free and Reduced Meals.**

In late 2013, a team comprised of District administrators, Board committee members and a State appointed monitor began an in depth review of applications submitted by employees of the District for purpose of receiving free and reduced priced meals for their children in our schools. During the District's preliminary review, it appeared likely that at least 15 employees had misrepresented their household incomes on official applications for purposes of receiving free and reduced priced meals for their children. Based on initial preliminary findings, the District then contacted the Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance (OFAC) at the State of New Jersey Department of Education, as well as State law enforcement agencies. The District and OFAC have now completed their investigations. OFAC's Report of Examination, which is available here for review, was issued on September 25, 2014.

The investigations covered applications for free and reduced priced meals submitted by employees of the Board for the fiscal years 2008 through 2013. District investigators and OFAC auditors confirmed the District's preliminary findings that 17 support staff employees (no teachers) made misrepresentations of income on their applications. Of the 17 employees that have been found to have made misrepresentations, four (4) employees were found to have committed immaterial errors overstating their incomes. Of the remaining 13 employees whose applications contained misrepresentations of household income, seven (7) employees were found to have improperly received benefits over the investigative period. Six (6) employees were determined to be eligible for the Free and Reduced Priced Meals Program after correction of their household incomes. Eligibility requirements for meal benefits is prescribed by the "New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Guidance for Determining Officials."

The investigative findings have identified the following number of employee misrepresentations of household income, which caused employees to improperly obtain meal benefits for their children:

- 2010-11: 4
- 2011-12: 1
- 2012-13: 3
- 2013-14: 7

Education is a public trust. The public, the Board, and the entire District staff share the mutual objective of providing the best possible education for the children of the City of Garfield. The subject employees have threatened to harm that trust and the Board, Administration and our dedicated law-abiding staff members will not permit it. We will do everything in our authority to ensure that the public trust remains intact. We will be unyielding in the pursuit of monetary restitution from the employees that improperly received benefits and will fully support the Administration's recommendation for appropriate discipline of the offenders. The Board appreciates the understanding of the public and staff during this process, and we thank you for joining together with us in condemning the actions of these individuals.